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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000205

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MOPS MASS SO ET KE KN

SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ETHIOPIAN STATE MINISTER TO ANNOUNCE
MILITARY'S WITHDRAWAL

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 173

- 1B. ADDIS ABABA 161 (NOTAL)
- 1C. ADDIS ABABA 115 (NOTAL)
- 1D. ADDIS ABABA 105 (NOTAL)
- 1E. ADDIS ABABA 40
- 1F. 06 ADDIS ABABA 2170 (NOTAL)

Classified By: ERIC WONG, DEPUTY POL-ECON COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.4 (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda informed Ambassador on January 23 that he was preparing a public statement on the Ethiopian military's withdrawal from Somalia, following consultations between Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) President Yusuf and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles, and a visit by Foreign Minister Seyoum to Mogadishu. Reporting on meetings with clan representatives in Mogadishu, Tekeda said Ayr sub-clan backers of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) were chiefly concerned about compensation for confiscated property, rather than political inclusion. Tekeda hailed cooperation between PM Meles and Kenyan President Kibaki, but highlighted lack of follow-up by Kenyan government subordinates as a problem. Tekeda denied MSF allegations that Ethiopian troops had falsified seized medical records of CIC combatants, questioning the credibility of information based solely on Somali sources likely sympathetic to the CIC. Tekeda welcomed the opportunity to work with USG experts on weaning Ethiopia from its reliance on North Korean munitions, but claimed the GOE had no alternative in the short-term. (Minister Tekeda's comments on the sensitivity of Ethiopia openly opposing Sudanese President Bashir's candidacy for AU Assembly Chair will be reported septel.) END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In a January 23 meeting with Ambassador and deputy pol-econ counselor (note-taker), State (i.e., deputy) Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu (accompanied by MFA acting Director General for Europe and America Almaz Ameha and First Secretary Araya Kidane) affirmed the GOE's intent to withdraw Ethiopian military forces (ENDF) from Somalia, saying he was preparing a public statement on the withdrawal. The announcement followed consultations on the evening of January 22 between Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf, who had flown to Addis Ababa with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, after FM Seyoum's visit earlier in the day to Mogadishu. Ambassador hailed Ethiopia's military success in Somalia. and the GOE's

role in urging the TFG to be politically inclusive (ref B); affirmed the U.S. commitment to continue intelligence-sharing and cooperation with the GOE; and highlighted that the USG was moving ahead to provide USD 40 million in assistance for Somalia to stabilize the TFG. Tekeda responded that the EU's January 22 statement on Somalia had not been as encouraging, possibly due to Italian and Swedish opposition to Ethiopian interests.

COMPENSATION FOR PROPERTY IS AYR'S KEY CONCERN

¶13. (C) Reporting on meetings in Mogadishu with representatives of the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan, the primary backers of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), Tekeda said the Ayr's primary concern was pragmatic: "Property, not politics, is their preoccupation." At issue was how to provide compensation for confiscated land. Tekeda stressed the need to provide compensation through a legal framework, which may require assistance from international donors. He said the Ayr, or "dispossessed," originally hailed from the Mudug region in central Somalia, not Mogadishu, and displaced the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Saad sub-clan in the post-Siad Barre era. By developing close business ties with Djibouti's President Guelleh, the Ayr controlled Mogadishu, he said. Ethiopia had sought to reach out to the Ayr since the CIC's ascendancy in July 2006, Tekeda said, but the Ayr had been "misled" by Eritrean President Isaias and by CIC Shura Chairman Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys.

KENYA'S WEAK FOLLOW-THROUGH IMPEDES COOPERATION

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¶14. (C) Ambassador observed that ENDF Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Samora Yonus and Director of Military Intelligence Brigadier General Yohannes Gebremeskel had expressed concern that Kenya was not doing all it could to apprehend CIC extremists fleeing to Kenya's borders, who could then return to Somalia to threaten its stability. Tekeda characterized relations between PM Meles and Kenyan President Kibaki and FM Tuju as "excellent," but observed that follow-up by Kenyan subordinates was lacking. In Ethiopia, Tekeda said, "once a decision is made, it is implemented everywhere," with only lack of capacity as a possible constraint. "In Kenya, that is not what you get." Tekeda nevertheless hailed the "synergy" that could be achieved by Ethiopia-Kenyan cooperation.

QUESTIONING CREDIBILITY OF MSF ACCUSATIONS

¶15. (C) Asked to respond to Medecins Sans Frontieres' (MSF) allegation that ENDF forces occupied an MSF hospital in Dinsor, Somalia, and had falsified medical files relating to CIC combatants in order to label several as foreign fighters (ref A), Tekeda denied the charge and questioned its credibility. As all of MSF's international staff had been evacuated prior to the December 26 incident, MSF's account was based solely on information from Somali sources: "They are the ones who fabricated the story, on the basis of some make-believe from their Somali employees." Ayr sub-clan representatives in Mogadishu had "high praise" for the conduct of ENDF forces, who would have had nothing to gain from such falsification, he said. MSF had sought to highlight publicly that it had not cooperated with the Ethiopian military, and had "besmirched" the ENDF by releasing false accusations to the international community. The GOE sought to address the issue without fanfare, Tekeda said.

¶16. (U) Hailing Ethiopia's recent submission of its Memorandum

of Foreign Trade Regime to the WTO, Ambassador discussed opportunities for further bilateral cooperation on political and economic reform. Acknowledging the Prime Minister's recent request to A/S Frazer for food aid to assist Ethiopia's urban poor (ref C), Ambassador noted that the GOE's food grain board could loosen its tight control on the disbursement of agricultural inputs. Opportunities for private-sector engagement included the establishment of a bilateral chamber of commerce, encouraging corporate philanthropists, and building on the goodwill established by the Ethiopia's growing role in international adoptions.

SEEKING ALTERNATIVES TO NORTH KOREAN GOODS

¶17. (C) Ambassador expressed appreciation for Tekeda's earlier acknowledgement that Ethiopia expected to receive North Korean goods, including spare tank parts and chemicals for production of conventional ammunition (ref D), and reaffirmed interest in working with State Minister of Defense Sultan Mohammed to find alternatives to Ethiopia's reliance on North Korean inputs. Tekeda responded that such alternatives had to be developed for the long term: "in the short term, we have no alternative." Ambassador noted that the U.S. would continue to oppose importation of all North Korean products, despite the challenges the GOE faced, but that the USG would work with the GOE to find alternatives.

¶18. (C) Tekeda concluded by underscoring the value of continuing close bilateral consultations. Noting "skepticism about information coming from Ethiopia, Tekeda observed that Ethiopia had warned of the threat posed by rising Islamic extremists in Somalia since at least 1996.

¶19. (C) COMMENT: Foreign Minister Seyoum's recent consultations in Mogadishu highlight that he continues to play a personal role in seeking to stabilize and counsel the TFG; in August 2006, he traveled to Baidoa to mediate among the TFG president, prime minister, and parliamentary speaker,

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who had been divided over whether to engage in dialogue with the CIC (ref F). A public announcement of the ENDF's withdrawal would not necessarily mean the departure of all Ethiopian forces from Somalia, although it may be calculated to focus international attention on the urgent need to deploy a replacement force (e.g., IGASOM). Prime Minister Meles informed USG principals two weeks ago (ref E) of Ethiopia's desire to withdraw as soon as possible, to prevent Ethiopians from being targets of terrorist attacks, but noted that significant ENDF forces would remain poised at the Ethiopia-Somalia border, and that some Ethiopian trainers and commanders would remain incognito and embedded within Somali TFG units. END COMMENT.

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